

TWO goals in two minutes early in the second half sent Wycombe Wanderers tumbling to their fifth Rothmans Isthmian League defeat in 13 matches on Saturday at Topfield, Hitchin. But the Blues must have been kicking themselves after a game they should have won with ease, writes **Stuart Earp**.

A corner ratio of 16-5 to Wycombe illustrates the amount of pressure Hitchin were under throughout the 90 minutes. Wanderers had at least 60 per cent of the play, carved out at least double the number of goalscoring chances — and yet finished on the losing side. The reason? They just could not put the ball in the net — something which has been their main failing all season.

Although Hitchin have begun the season well, they looked an ordinary outfit on Saturday — the sort of team Wycombe would have made short work of last term. But things never seem to go right when you're down and Wanderers seemed dogged by ill fortune from the start. A bad bounce here, a deflection there — nothing went right for them at Topfield.

In the end, however, the Blues could have few excuses. They could have overcome their bad luck but they seldom looked like finding the net throughout the game. Terry Reardon and Co. worked like trojans in midfield, one of Wycombe's few successes on Saturday, but the front runners and the defence were never happy.

Manager Brian Lee dropped skipper John Delaney after his nightmare game at Slough last Tuesday, bringing in Dave Bullock at centre-back while Tommy James replaced Dave Alexander in midfield. Bullock gave a characteristic fighting performance at the back, although as it turned out, Delaney would have been useful in view of the number of corners won by Wycombe.

John Maskell had to push away a Neil Bunker effort after 10 minutes but when Bullock went close with a header at the other end, it signalled a spell of considerable pressure from Wycombe. Reardon, who did particularly well in the air, set up a number of attacks but the final scoring pass did not come. Once Keith Mead, captain for the day, saw a header blocked on the line and Geoff Anthony's follow-up met a similar fate.

The best effort of the half, however, came from Hitchin. Dave Webb picked up the ball from a corner and lashed a 25-

Hitchin Town 2, Wycombe Wanderers 0

yard drive towards the top of the net but Maskell flung himself full length to save.

So, after 45 minutes, Wanderers must have been reasonably pleased with their efforts. They had more of the play, held the edge in midfield while the defence was seldom troubled. Four minutes of the second half transformed the situation.

Hitchin's first goal came after only two minutes. Ray Eaton gave away a free kick on the flank. Kevin Hammond curled the ball over and Bunker headed firmly into the net. The goal was a shoddy piece of defensive work by Wanderers. Either the goalkeeper should have come off his line or someone should have cut out the cross.

Before Wanderers had time to recover from that setback, they had another on their hands. Dave McCormick made ground on the wing and then set Bunker away. He took the ball to the byeline and then cut across and centred low and hard — the type of ball all defences hate. This time Hammond was on the spot to side foot past Maskell, who had no chance.

Although the defence never really recovered their first half poise, the Blues fought back well — but found their way blocked by ill luck. Tony Horseman clipped the angle of bar and post with a clever free kick and then Evans and Eaton sent shots off target.

On two occasions Hitchin were in a terrible muddle inside their own penalty area but the scrambles always seemed to go their way.

Williams came to Hitchin's rescue with 75 minutes gone. Reardon's cross was headed down by Horseman to Anthony but the latter's shot was tipped away by the goalkeeper.

Gradually totting up that large number of corners, Wycombe pressed hard to get back into the game but their set piece moves were eminently disappointing. Every time the ball

was pumped into the six yard box. Not once did they try a short ball, or a low cross.

In the end they were fortunate not to concede further goals when Paul Giggie netted only to be ruled off-side. No side has ever taken a £40 bonus from the Blues but Hitchin came close to it on Saturday. As for

Wycombe . . . they'll just be glad to put this game completely out of their minds and start afresh against A.C. Monza tomorrow.

HITCHIN: A. Williams; D. Webb, J. Kettleborough, D. McCormick, A. Martin; A. Brothers, D. Archibald, K. Hammond; G. Conroy, N. Bunker, P. Giggie. Sub. M. Howkins (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Eaton; T. James (sub. H. Kennedy, 71 mins.); T. Reardon, M. Hollifield; A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony.

Referee: J. Barker (Doddington). **Half-time:** 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Hitchin: Bunker (47), Hammond (49).

SATURDAY'S FIXTURES

(K.O. 3 p.m.)

Rothmans Isthmian League, Division 1: Bishops Stortford v. Wycombe Wanderers.

Athenian League, Division 1: Addlestone v. Marlow.

London Spartan League, Division 2: Amersham Town v. East Thurrock, Chalfont St. Peter v. Crown and Manor.

Rothmans Hellenic League Cup, 1st round: Burnham v. Thatcham.